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ABSTRACT

A key to the group dynamics process in teleconferencing is interaction and the use of interactive technologies. The user of teleconferencing for instruction has to accept several underlying assumptions: lecture is not necessarily sound instruction, especially for adults; teleconferencing is easy; and teleconferences require planning. Benefits are personalization of content and feedback on lesson progress. To prepare for group processes, an instructor must use techniques that provide an "instructional set." Using bridges or configurations on the telenetwork, the speaker can interact with groups in various patterns. The instructor can choose to have one group or any number of groups with any number of participants. Smaller groups generate greater interest and participation. Planning group membership is important; a matrix or a tally sheet is useful for doing this. The instructor and program facilitator should remember when using small groups on the telenetwork that small groups may not be the best way for some topics and that some groups and the whole program should be considered when selecting techniques. (YLB)

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Interactive Ideas

A Presentation

To

Iowa Valley Community College

Telenetwork Seminar

Marshalltown, Iowa

August 30, 1984

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Introduction

One of the techniques to promote interaction in teleconferencing programs is the the use of a quiz. We have found this generates interest, gets attention and can be used to promote participation and interaction either during its use or after the program. The first few minutes of this presentation will be informal. The reason is to demonstrate one of the ways in which we promote interaction and provide a concrete example for your possible use. This is also a way to get you involved in the presentation that follows. The quiz on the overhead transparency (Transparency #1) is one of the kinds of things we have used to generate participation and even though this is not a teleconference seminar it may do some of the same things. If you are interested, at the end we can go back to answer some of the questions.

A key to the group dynamics process in teleconferencing is interaction and the use of interactive technologies. There have been some attempts to describe interactive technologies and one author (Lewis, 1983) describes them as those techniques that permit at a minimum, some form of two-way communication. He says that, in contrast noninteractive technologies refers to communication in only one direction. This is probably as simple a definition of interactive technologies as we can get so it provides a good starting point for us today.

The importance of networking by telephone is increasing. My early days of teleconferencing in Iowa and some of the attempts to get teleconferencing in Arkansas were crude by today's technology. There are many reasons why using the telephone, or audio teleconferencing, is on the increase. The most pervasive reasons focus around costs. It's important to note that some studies have found that audio teleconferencing costs less and that it is considered just as valuable as other media for conducting instruction (Kuramoto, 1984). This would seem to be significant in terms of the area colleges in Iowa who are active in providing instruction to help professionals that must meet the requirements under the 1977 Omnibus Continuing Education legislation. In our state, South Dakota, we are also beginning to increase our use of teleconferencing to satisfy requirements.

It appears to me, that the user of teleconferencing for instruction has to come to grips with several underlying assumptions. These assumptions may also hold true for other kinds of teleconferencing, not just audio.

1. The straight lecture, or talking at--the participants is not necessarily sound instruction, especially when teaching adults.
2. The use of teleconferencing, by phone, is as easy and as much a part of our day to day work as many things we do. Most of us use the telephone in some way almost every day.

3. The planning necessary for a good teleconference program inherently makes the program better. Teleconferences require planning.

At the same time -- you have many of the benefits found in face to face instruction— in terms of personalizing content, and being able to get feedback on the progress of the lesson or the message.

GROUP PROCESS

In order to prepare for group processes it is important to utilize a techniques that provides an "instructional set" so that the participants are ready for group processes. This can be done by telling the participants in the class that you are going to use the group(s) as part of the instruction that goes on in the class. A means of doing this is to announce it to the class or provide it by some other way such as a formal statement like:

> In this teleconference program the instructor uses small group discussion methods. This is important to promote the personal growth of participants and improve discussion and problem solving skills. You are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities to work in groups which may be organized in varying sizes and shapes. The end result of work in group sessions is an enhancement of learning and a better understanding of the subject matter.

A statement on the use of groups such as this is useful in the registration materials, letters of confirmation,

syllabii or other material. This provides some form of "readiness" for participants.

The technology needed in configurating groups on the telenet is important. We use the Darome unit, though there are other "bridges" that seem to function well. The University of South Dakota Medical School houses the technology and operation of the teletwork in our state. The bridging technology is in its simplest form not much more than a big switchboard. There are however more complex aspects and features that a technician or engineer might better be able to answer, but for small groups configurations-bridges are the most useful. The technician operating the equipment is probably the best reason that we're able to work with small groups. The network technician in our system does an outstanding job. It appears to me that a dedicated network, like the one used in the Area Schools, can also be used to configurate into groups, though it's slightly different. We are not going to address that today.

In order to understand groups the drawings on the transparency that follows is diagrammed in such a way that the lines connect the speaker to the groups. They represent essentially, the interaction pattern that goes on between the speaker and the group. The first part of the transparency (Transparency #2) shows how the instructor and a group traditionally interact. This shows the instructor

interacting with all participants on the network. This sort of pattern would be true of the traditional lecture format, a presentation, or other single person to"other persons" program. This is the format that many programs use at first and are most familiar with in their operation.

Moving down on the diagram is the configuration for the instructor and two groups. This might typically occur with an instructor and just two locations on the network. With a "bridging device" you can cluster almost any number of location intc two groups. This format is especially useful if you have an outside speaker that is "added on" to the network frcm some distant location. In this case the groups would come up with a given number of questions for the speaker beforehand. Those questions not answered during the speakers presentation, could be discussed after the speaker has finished the formal remarks. This sensitizes the groups to what the speaker may say, and increases their listening skills for the presentation. This approach is not necessarily unique. If you want other techniques I recommend a publication titled: TELECONFERENCING, A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO TEACHING BY TELEPHONE. The author is Bronstein and others, and the publisher is The American Society of Clinical Patholcgist. There are also other excellent publications that have come from the Staff of the University of Wisconsin's Center for Interactive Programs that you may want to read, for fresh approaches and ideas.

The third part of the transparency showing Group Configuration Patterns is a little more complex. This approach is especially useful and valuable for generating interest and participation. It is a technique that can use fewer or more numbers of groups than are shown in the diagram. In this format, one limitation is the "bridging" technology. However, choosing the number of participants and the numbers of groups is still a decision that is left up to the instructor. Again, the technician at the central "bridging" location is critical.

Looking at the last part of the diagram it shows three basic formats.

1. The instructor facilitates 4 groups. In the case of 20 persons enrolled in the program this is divided into 4 groups of 5 persons (assuming 5 at each location). This requires a group leader at each location to lead the discussion and to report to the group. You may separate the"leading" and "reporting" assignments to get broader involvement among the participants.
2. The second phase of this format moves the 4 small groups into 2 larger groups with perhaps 10 persons in each group. The two groups report their progress to each other, discuss ideas, exchange information and provide a summary of all inputs.

3. Finally the groups can reconfigurate into any other format or mix of persons that the instructor considers meaningful. This may also include the technique where the instructor has a separate meeting with one of the groups to deal with a specific question or issue, while the other group(s) work together on some other topic or project. Or it may involve some configuration that allows two or more separate presentations by groups by separate speakers from the "outside" or within the groups.

4. Its important to remember to charge the groups with tasks, and assignments and require accountability. It is also important to appoint persons, specifically to handle the activities of the group. This may mean that someone is designated the leader, the chairperson, the recorder, the observer or other roles or assignments that are appropriate to the program.

This approach has some risks and it's important to point them out. It's easy to let the time get away from you, so always announce the amount of time to be used and hold the groups to a schedule as tightly as possible. It is also important to let the groups know what is going to happen and why you are doing it. And finally the membership of each group is important, in the sense that you have to know who fits well with which group and we have a tool for doing that

which is useful. Along with these groups and others it helps to keep a tally of interactions. This point will be discussed later.

It's important to point out that participants in general, seem to be more interactive in smaller groups. There is some evidence that smaller groups also get away from the problems that come up in larger sized groupings of people (Stephen 1980). Our experience is that we find them more receptive , easier to work with on the network.

It was mentioned earlier that matching in the groups is important. A matrix is useful for doing this and an example is provided. (Transparency #3) The top part of the matrix is a set of criteria established by the instructor. This may vary according to the class. The left side is the listing of participants. The participant can be checked off or groups numbered in the squares so that you can assign the group for each participant. It takes time but it is part of the planning and helps when making the groups either homogeneous, or heterogeneous.

There is another instrument that is useful when deciding what to do with groups. I again refer you back to the book I previously mentioned from the American Society of Clinical Pathologist which has a collection of techniques. Because telentwork programs are, at times, threatening to some participants the techniques you use are sometimes threatening. To get some perspective on this-- techniques

can be ordered into a hierarchy according to degree of threat to the participant. It's then possible to place these techniques on a threat-level continuum. The overhead transparency (Transparency #4) shows those participation activities that are somewhat low in threat level on the left and those that are more threatening or on a higher threat level to the right. Some of these activities depend on the skill of the instructor so there is nothing absolute about their placement.

As mentioned previously, it is useful to keep a tally of participant interactions. This is needed so that you can bring those who might have been overlooked or forgotten, into the interaction. It is recognized that large numbers in a class prevent this from being easy to do, but it can also be used to keep a count by location, or membership group in the program, or some other arbitrary classification. Thelayout on the transparency (Transparency #5) has the names along the left column and then two columns for a two part program, with a third column for general comments or suggestions.

CONCLUSIONS

All of the items mentioned here can facilitate the processes of interaction on networks. Planning for interaction is important whether you use a matrix, keep track of interactions with a tally sheet or look for ways to break into small groups. The most important consideration

is to plan for it. The techniques and their selection deserves more than superficial study.

There are several points that I believe are important to remember when using small groups on the telenetwork. These aren't hard and fast rules, but guidelines that will help the instructor and program facilitator to be more effective.

1. It is not the only way to provide instruction that promotes interaction.
2. Using small groups may not be the best way for some topics and some groups.
3. It is necessary to take into consideration that there are other constraints when using small groups. The time, the technology and the teacher are several.
4. Like all sound instructional design practices it is important to systematically look at the overall program and provide the techniques that are best suited when one looks at all the factors.

If there are any questions or comments we can continue. For those of you still here and interested I have the answers to the questions on the first transparency (quiz)..... Thank you.

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Appendix of Transparencies

TRANSPARENCY # 1

WORLD'S EASIEST QUIZ ?

1. HOW LONG DID THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR LAST ?

2. IN WHICH COUNTRY ARE PANAMA HATS MADE :

3. WHERE DO WE GET CATGUT?

4. WHAT ARE MOLESKIN TROUSERS MADE OF ?

5. LOUIS XVIII WAS THE LAST ONE, HOW MANY PREVIOUS KINGS OF FRANCE WERE NAMED LOUIS ?

6. WHAT KIND OF CREATURES WERE THE CANARY ISLES NAMED AFTER ?

7. WHAT WAS KING GEORGE VI'S FIRST NAME ?

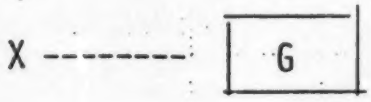
8. WHAT COLOR IS A PURPLE FINCH ?

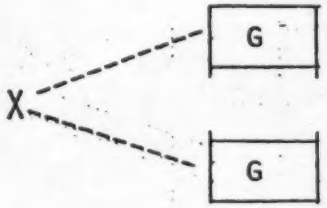
9. WHAT IS A CAMEL'S - HAIR BRUSH MADE OF ?

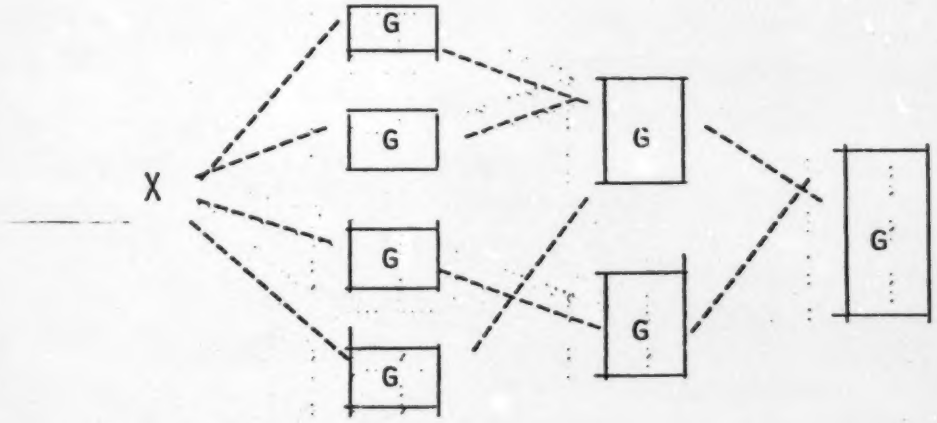
10. HOW LONG DID THE THIRTY YEARS WAR LAST?

TRANSPARENCY # 2

GROUP CONFIGURATION PATTERNS







TRANSPARENCY # 3

GROUP PLANNING MATRIX

PARTICIPANT	SEX	LOCATION	JOB	EXPERIENCE	TYPE_PROG.	LEADERSHIP	NUMBER	
"A"	✓	▽	▽	X		X		X	
"B"		X			X		X		
"C"	✓		✓	X	▽	✓		✓	
"D"		X			X			X	
"E"	✓			X	▽	▽		▽	▽
"F"		X				X			

TRANSPARENCY #4

INTERACTIVE TECHNIQUE BY THREAT LEVEL

- INFORMAL DISCUSSION
- QUESTION/ANSWER
- INTERVIEW
- DIALOGUE
- WORK SHEETS
- CASE STUDIES
- READING
- ROLE PLAYING
- REPORT
- TEST - DISCUSSION
- DEBATE/REACTION

TRANSPARENCY # 5

PARTICIPANT INTERACTION TALLY SHEET

	PART 1	PART 2	COMMENTS
SMITH			
JONES			
BROWN			
HILL			
CARTER			
WRIGHT			
PARKER			
LONG			

ETC.....